

No Pardons for Thousands of North Korean Prisoners

✖ Today U.S. journalists Euna Lee and Laura Ling returned home to their friends and family in an emotional reunion after North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il issued a special pardon. Their return came after former U.S. President Bill Clinton made an unannounced visit to Pyongyang to help secure their release.

Ling and Lee had been found guilty of allegedly entering North Korea illegally across the Chinese border in March and later sentenced to 12 years of hard labor. They reportedly were being held at a “guest house” during their confinement.

The North Korean News Agency said the two reporters’ pardon and release was a sign of North Korea’s “humanitarian and peace-loving policy.”

That might be the case in this instance, but let’s look at the facts:

- North Korea is suspected of detaining more political and religious prisoners than any other country in the world. Open Doors, an international Christian organization which supports persecuted believers (), puts the number of prisoners at least 200,000, including 40,000 to 60,000 Christians.
- North Koreans can be imprisoned for virtually any state-defined crime such as owning a Bible, making a negative comment about the regime, failing to have a picture of Kim Il-Sung in their house and traveling to China to look for food and freedom.
- KimJong-Il’s government keeps its citizens in its grip through systematic use of torture, public and private executions, brutal imprisonment, lack of due process of law,

starvation and even forced abortions.

- North Korea has been known to arrest not only the suspected dissident but also three generations of his/her family to “root out” the bad influence.

- This year North Korea was re-designated by the U.S. State Department as one of eight “Countries of Particular Concern” for its severe religious freedom violations. The Open Doors World Watch List of the worst persecutors of Christians has ranked the hermit country as the worst offender of religious freedom for seven years in a row.

The Associated Press reported last month that North Korea publicly executed a Christian woman for distributing Bibles, based on information it received from South Korean activists. Ri Hyon Ok, 33, was also accused of spying for South Korea and the United States and organizing dissidents, according to the Associated Press. She was executed in the northwestern city of Ryongchon near the border with China on June 16, according to a report from an alliance of several dozen anti-North Korean groups.

Ri’s parents, husband and three children were sent to a political prison camp in the northeastern city of Hoeryong the following day, according to the report, citing unidentified documents it said were obtained from North Korea.

This is the shocking reality of what takes place inside this communist country where there is no basic human rights. One colleague of mine who has traveled to North Korea described North Korea “as an on-going nightmare.”

It surely was a nightmare for Kim Young Soon, a special witness during North Korea Freedom Week in April before a group of Congressmen in Washington, D.C. The North Korean refugee is one of the few survivors of the infamous Yodok political prison camp. She was thrown into prison for nine years on a trumped up charge of divulging a secret about Kim Jong-Il’s marriage. Her parents and four children were also

imprisoned. In the Yodok prison camp, her parents died of malnutrition, an eldest son drowned. Her husband was shot to death in 1970 while attempting to cross the border to escape from North Korea. Mrs. Kim's youngest son was arrested in 1988 while attempting to cross the border and was put in prison for four years. He was executed in 1993 by a firing squad because he tried to escape from North Korea again. Mrs. Kim escaped from North Korea and resettled in South Korea. She has made it her life's mission to expose the cruelty and truth about the prison camps in North Korea.

She testified: "I entered prison camp No. 15 at Yodok. I spent nine years there; treated like an animal. What made me feel most mortified was the fact that my father, mother, daughter and three sons, who were innocent of any crime, were also sent to Yodok, all because of me.

"We were forced to engage in heavy labor day and night. On August 5, 1971, I lost my father. I had to wrap his body in a straw mat since there were no coffins in Yodok. Before long, my mother also died of malnutrition. Unbearable sadness cut my heart to pieces.

"Still with tears in my eyes, I was struck by another painful accident when my eldest son drowned. I was nearly mad with grief. Yodok was really a hell to me. I cried to God asking that He might burn them all to death in Yodok with lightning.

"Every mountain and field in Yodok was covered with dead bodies because of malnutrition and hunger. In 1973, two detainees were killed by public execution at a place between Sector 3 and 4 on charges of trying to escape from prison. Countless numbers of detainees were killed by public execution and torture. Due to malnutrition and hunger, little children withered to death with their stomachs swollen. Adult people were looking everywhere for young rats which they believed to be a kind of medicine to save their children. And they literally ate up all the snakes in Yodok to avoid painful death from malnutrition."

Yes, we should rejoice for Ling and Lee. They now have complete freedom in the United States.

But please join me in praying and advocating for those who

have not received pardons; for those languishing in the “hell” that is North Korea.

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